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Women's Concerns

Report




Women, Environment, and a Throw-Away Society

The importance of protecting our environment is receiving increased attention around the world. The multitude of environmental issues which could be addressed in an issue of Report is extensive. This issue focuses on the experiences of women from North America which have led them to an increased awareness of environmental issues within our industrialized world.

In this issue women share what they have learned as they try to answer for themselves how they can be better stewards of creation. Some women have begun to search for answers because of environmental threats to the areas where they live. For other women, the incentive to develop an environmental ethic comes from individual experiences with nature as a vital, living force, existing independent of the influences of human activity. In either case, these women are attempting to develop a lifestyle reflecting their deep concern and appreciation for creation.

Also included are reflections on the waste in industrialized society from an MCC worker in Zambia; an excerpt from a prophetic speech made in 1854 by Chief Seattle, a Native American, regarding the attitude of white settlers toward the earth and its abundant resources; and some

reflections of my own following a trip to the Appalachian region of Kentucky.

Prior to compiling this issue, I worked in the Washington Office of MCC for two years on environmental and domestic (social justice) issues. While I was working in the Washington Office, the broader Christian community, as well as many Mennonites, appeared to be going through a transition in their attitude toward environmental issues.

Christianity has traditionally sanctioned the use of the earth and its resources—both living and inanimate—for the benefit of humankind. However, many Christians are now realizing that this attitude has led to exploitation rather than stewardship of the earth. Some Christians are recognizing the earth as an inheritance from God for us to leave to future generations and seeing it as valuable in and of itself—separate from the economic values associated with its resources.

The disconnection between being a contributing member of a wasteful society and seeing the planet as a gift from God which we are to take care of is becoming evident to many people of faith. Because of this, the ramifications of environmental abuses on God's creation have become more important to many Christians. It is some of these women who share their experiences, the lessons they have learned, and the changes they have made in their lives in this issue of Report.

Cynthia Nolt served with MCC in Washington D.C. from 1987 to 1989. Currently she works in the Office of Water of the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington D.C. She attends the Arlington Church of the Brethren in Arlington, Va.

by Alta Dezort

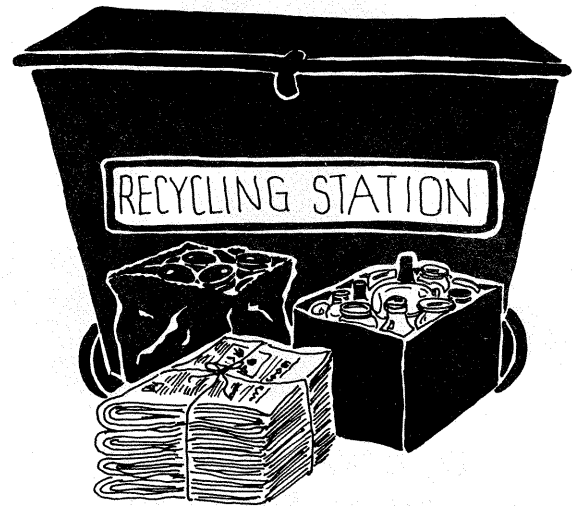
Our Home: Endangered

The telephone call came one Saturday morning in September, 1988. "Did I know that Pennalan Corporation wanted to site a landfill in White, Pa. (a rural community about one and a half miles from our home). Did I also know that 100 tractor-trailers filled with garbage would be passing our home every day?" I did not know how that call would change our lives. In the last 18 months, we have learned what our wasteful society is doing to our environment, how selfish and ignorant the public is (I was once a member of that club), and what a difference several changes in lifestyle can make to our planet.

Because the proposed landfill site was so close to our home, I decided to attend the upcoming meeting. It proved to be a real eye-opener! I learned what dangers the supposedly "benign" municipal landfill can pose to us and the environment. In the following months, I attended the court hearings in which our grassroots citizens group contested Pennalan Corporation's application for a zoning exception. The area was zoned only for residences and agriculture. Our case is still in the courts, awaiting the judge's decision on Pennalan's appeal. We did have a victory when the zoning board ruled against the exception.

This experience made me become aware of what our throw-away society was doing to our earthly home and I realized we must do our part to lessen the solid waste crisis. I proposed a recycling program to our church community, Kingview Mennonite Church in Scottdale, Pa., promising to see that the recyclables were delivered to a recycle center. Our recycling effort began in December of 1988 after another church member offered

an enclosed trailer and barrels for storage. Thanks to the wonderful cooperation of the church, we have successfully recycled thousands of pounds of glass, tin, plastic, aluminum, scrap metal, newspaper, and used car batteries. The monetary rewards are very limited, but the satisfaction gained from this positive step is tremendous.



The changes our family has made are not always easy. It is never easy to change habits. But we don't give up! We try to avoid excess packaging and pesticides by canning our own fruits and vegetables and buying things in recyclable containers. We try to go to restaurants that use glass dishes rather than those that use throw-away dishes which contribute to the solid waste crisis. Last week I discovered paper towels and toilet paper made from recycled paper at our local supermarket. This month our grassroots group has found an outlet for old newspaper—animal bedding! That's the good news. There are still so many areas where we haven't been able to change because alternatives are not available, or sadly, because we are not ready to give up our harmful, polluting ways. But we keep trying, one small step at a time.

As my awareness of the environmental crisis increased, I learned that we are not an isolated entity. Everything we do impacts on something or someone else on this planet. If we buy yellow fin tuna, we are contributing to the slaughter of dolphins; if we buy detergents that contain phosphorus, we contribute to death in our rivers and bays; if we buy and/or use styrofoam, we contribute to ozone depletion, litter that does not degrade, smog (caused by the gas used in production of styrofoam), and death to marine life that inadvertently eat it; if we don't

**"Out of the ground the Lord
God formed every beast of
the field and every bird of the
air..."** **Genesis 2:19**



**"Ecofeminism is no fixed
'ism.' It's not merely a joining
together of women's rights
and environmentalism. It
poses fundamental
challenges to our
understanding of ourselves,
our understanding of home."
Dr. Irene Diamond, University
of Oregon.**

recycle, we contribute to the solid waste problem; if we don't drive fuel-efficient cars, we contribute to the greenhouse effect, the depletion of non-renewable resources, and acid rain; if we don't responsibly dispose of household chemicals or use safe substitutes, we contribute to the poisoning of our groundwater; the list goes on. We must be good stewards of our home or our children will suffer the consequences. It can be overwhelming, but if we each make gradual changes in our habits the effects will be positive. That is what it means to think globally and act locally.

In my quest to improve the conditions of our planet, I have learned that I must say no to the corporate polluters who lobby in our nation's capital for permission to poison the air, water and soil. One way for each of us to say no is through our vote. Know how your legislators vote on key environmental issues and let them know you are watching. Boycott companies who treat the earth as a garbage dump. Learn which companies care about the environment and purchase their products. Be an environmentally smart shopper.

In my struggle to understand why we have put our planet in such peril and why it is so important that I do my part, I have repeatedly turned to my Christian faith. The Bible often reminds us that we are to care for the earth that God created and gave to us. Genesis 1 tells the story of the creation; many prophets remind us of our duty to preserve the earth. How can we, in all good conscience, not take care of this wonderful gift? I think we must all search our hearts and decide where our priorities lie. Do we want more disposables so we can do everything quicker or do we want the preservation of our planet? We can leave our children a better planet and one that will show God we are not poor stewards of the earth.

Alta Desort lives in Normalville, Pa. with her husband Bill and their three sons. They attend Kingview Mennonite Church in Scottdale. Alta works part-time for YMCA teaching aerobics and is involved with the Pennsylvania Environmental Network and Citizens to Protect Our Community.

by Anette Eisenbeis

This World Is My Home

It happened again last week. I met an acquaintance in our local supermarket who made the comment, "Oh, so you get hungry too." Whatever the words used, similar casual greetings on many occasions imply that if it weren't for those regular trips to the grocery store we would all starve. In a town where nearly every household could have a vegetable garden, there are many who see production of one's own food as a ridiculous waste of time and energy. Even in this relatively isolated rural area there is a growing percentage of the populace which is convinced that all the necessities of life come in neatly sealed cartons of paper or plastic, marked with a dollars-and-cents value.

I am speaking of consumerism, the logical result of an ever-increasing degree of specialization in which an individual may produce only one item or service and with her/his earning purchase everything else she/he needs from other producers. This might seem like a superb accomplishment in convenience and cooperative organization. The problem is that the earth, our home, is not made to function that way. We have selfishly separated ourselves from the rest of creation. The incredible capabilities of technology meant for human enjoyment are accompanied by ignorance or disregard for what our environment dictates for sustainable life. Our planet simply cannot provide enough resources to continue giving even a small percentage of its human occupants the kind of convenience and overabundance to which we have become accustomed.

How did all this happen—and in such a relatively short time? I believe we have mindlessly accepted several

assumptions that sounded fine, but are proving to be, if not actually immoral, at the very least, misleading. Here are some of them:

Assumption 1: "Saving" time and work is progress. We are slaves to convenience and efficiency. Relief from some of the drudgery and over-exertion which once characterized every worker's life may be justifiable, but that benefit has been blindly pursued until the filling of leisure time in itself has become an important consumer element.

Assumption 2: To live in the style or at the standard of our parents and grandparents is a disgrace. Change is progress. This creates problems because the changes we like best are the ones which allow us to spend more and more money on activities and things that are less and less necessary to human existence.

Assumption 3: "I can afford it, so why not?" There is a real temptation to measure value or waste strictly in dollars and cents. This attitude assures us that we deserve whatever we can pay for, especially if we have worked hard for the money. It does not matter what resources it takes from others, or what harm it may cause—if we can afford it, we are entitled to it.

Assumption 4: "People are more important than things: my use of consumer items frees me to do more important things." This is tricky because it sounds so noble. The truth is that the number of things we use and the manner in which we use them have a significant impact on other people!

All consumer items do not come from supermarkets and shopping malls. Energy, in the form of electricity or fossil fuels, is easily available and relatively inexpensive to nearly all North Americans. Energy has become a "necessity" for everything from cooking a meal to getting to work and so it is consumed carelessly and voraciously. Another such "necessity" is water. Its presence, profusion and purity are all taken for granted; we assume it is there simply for us to use. We mine our soil, continually putting more and more land into "production," while our precious top soil runs off into our rivers and streams. Entertainment is now bought and consumed. The list goes on.

Are we like spoiled children to whom so much has been given that they have appreciation for nothing, but still crave more things because they know of nothing else to value? If so, is this a concern for Christian women? It is,

if they feel a compassion for the unborn generations whose resources are already being depleted; if they sense the inequality and injustice that allows those living in "developed" countries to have ease and abundance while putting the disadvantaged millions in danger from the polluted air, water and soil they themselves risk because of their own consumptive habits.

What should be done about it? Should we feel guilty? Yes! Guilt is a natural, healthy and useful human response to something that should never have happened. It is not meant to crush us, only to correct us! The only time legitimate guilt can damage our psyche is when we lack the courage to change our behavior.

So what are the changes for which we should strive in our personal and societal lifestyle? Many readers will find them familiar. They can probably be summed up in the popular admonition: REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE.



Reduce is the first but most difficult change. It means denying ourselves things we feel we are entitled to, not for the immediate goal of saving money, but in respect for the Creator and for the rest of creation. It means willingly and deliberately lessening our use of resources. Begin with actions such as these:

- walk or bicycle whenever possible
- turn your thermostat to 65 degrees in winter and 75 in summer—or simply use a fan!
- use household cleaners that are non-toxic
- buy foods using less packaging and produce as much of your own food as you can

"As many as 75 percent of grass-roots environmentalists are women."

**Prof. Carolyn Merchant,
University of Calif. at
Berkeley.**



—consider some kinds of tidiness (like never letting dirty dishes or dirty clothes pile up) as a luxury instead of a virtue. Save water and detergent by washing less often.

Reuse means choosing to use items that have an indefinite period of usefulness instead of more convenient disposable items. Using washable dishes, cloth diapers, napkins, towels and handkerchiefs lessens our consumption of paper. That's good news because burning throw away items pollutes the air and not burning them stuffs landfills. Besides, using less paper lets trees stay alive. When you shop carry a reusable bag for groceries and other purchases.

Recycling is a responsible way to handle materials one still acquires after reducing and reusing faithfully. To carefully store paper, glass, aluminum, and metals until they can be collected and reprocessed is a small price to pay in return for the energy and raw materials that are conserved, to say nothing of lengthening the life of local landfills. Each ton of recycled paper saves 20 trees. Recycling a ton of glass saves 37 liters of oil.

As Christian women in North America we may not have been personally or consciously involved in the process that brought on what is called the environmental crisis, but there is no question about our involvement in the current practice of it. Do we have the courage and conviction to extricate ourselves as much as possible and become part of the solution? Let us channel our power to buy—and our willpower not to buy—into a clear witness against the thoughtless wastefulness and greed of this generation.

Anette Eisenbeis of Freeman, S.D. is a member of Salem Zion Mennonite Church. She and her husband, Larry, are the parents of four grown children.

by Linda Nafziger-Meiser

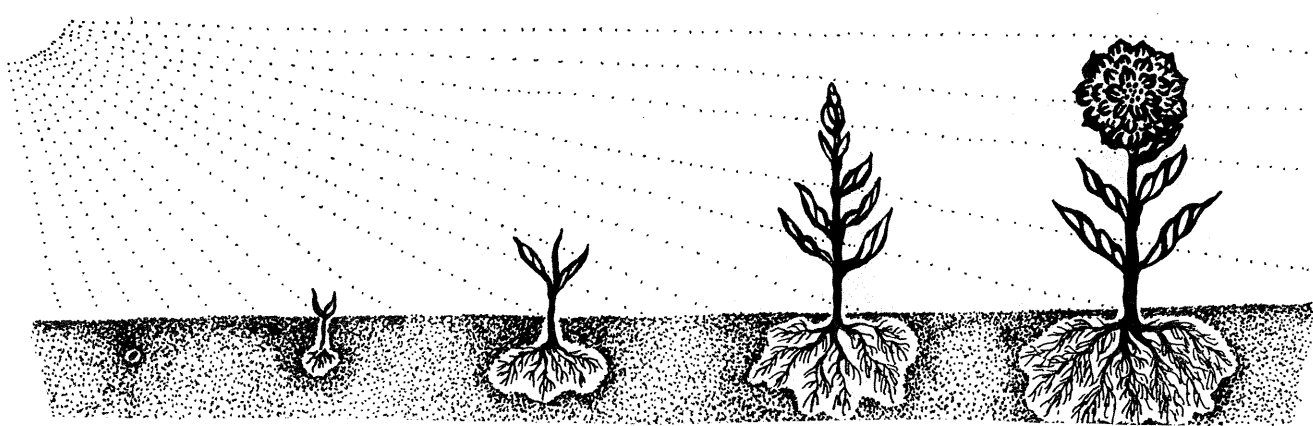
Contrasting Treasures

Our time in the United States was a real kaleidoscope of impressions, feelings and frantic activity as we were re-introduced to shopping malls, Christmas advertising and hosts of friends and family. The first week back we stopped by what used to be my favorite grocery store. It had moved across the street and at least tripled in size.

Halfway up the breakfast cereal aisle, we had enough. Gary said, "Let's get out of here!" and we did. It was overwhelming and seemed obscene: 50?, 100? ways to spoon more sugar into a sugar saturated society first thing in the morning?

That sense of excess hung over much of our time at home. While I learned to enjoy grocery shopping again and reveled in yogurt and fruit juice nearly every day, there was always an undertone of uneasiness. Most of our friends seemed both richer and fatter than I remembered and I found it hard to deal with the waste. We saw refrigerators jammed so full of holiday food that much spoiled. Trash cans were full of unread advertisements and magazines with lovely glossy color pictures, and paper printed on only one side, newspapers and brown paper sacks, plastic bags, tins, plastic containers and jars with tight lids; all multi-use items often in short supply here in Zambia. The Thanksgiving-Christmas-New Year season is a bad time to make a cultural re-entry...unless you prefer to get it all in one big shock!

Another thing that surprised us was how immediately we were sucked into the treadmill of frantic activity. Far from being a break it was as hectic as Zambia, but perhaps more fun as we met with hordes of people, did business and took birthing classes. We showed our slides to church groups, family members, friends and in some Eastern Mennonite College classes. And we found ourselves giving impromptu talks on our work and the



Zambian situation to people in some surprising surroundings like stores, on the street, in the hospital and in a Le Leche league meeting. We had expected to meet with more apathy, but people seemed genuinely interested.

Coming back to Zambia and settling in has gone pretty smoothly. I was wiped out for the first two weeks, but fortunately it poured rain every day so we had only a few visitors. By the time we were unpacked and getting life organized the rains stopped and we were pleased to have guests. People have responded with such delight to Frieda; it's been a real treat.

I was especially touched when our good friend Lenty Mutinta came bringing his wife and youngest child, whom they named after me. We played with each other's baby for awhile and I noticed with pain that little Linda was tiny—nine months older than three-month-old Frieda, but only a few pounds heavier. I thought too of their other children. They have had four children; two have died of diarrhea.

After awhile Lenty looked at his wife and said something I didn't catch. She smiled and handed me a basket. I looked in it and saw some plastic trash and a heap of small Irish potatoes. I exclaimed with real gratitude about the potatoes knowing that they must have gone to considerable trouble to find them as a special treat for these potato-loving white people.

Lenty leaned forward and picked up the trash and held it out to me with pleasure and dignity. "This is for the baby," he said. My eyes refocussed and reinterpreted with a jolt and I saw what he was giving her: two little clear plastic glasses and two lovely flat plastic dishes. They were attractive, useful, desirable. I thanked them with all the grace I could muster, hoping that my discomposure didn't show.

After they left I sat for awhile holding those little disposable dishes and fighting tears. "Zambia Airways" they said on the bottoms. I felt like swearing at a world where things are so screwed up that mountains of containers are used once and discarded by people who doubtless have several sets of dishes at home, while others who would be pleased to have disposable dishes to carefully wash and reuse only occasionally happen upon them like a treasure.

This piece, excerpted from a six-month report, was written upon the Nafziger-Meisers' return to Zambia following a trip home for the birth of their daughter.

by Gloria Musson, Corinne Marshall, Heather Marshall

Have You Thanked A Green Plant Today?

Many of us exist far removed from the natural world. We live in cities of concrete and asphalt and our senses have become dulled to creation and its rhythms. However, at this point in the life cycle of our world, we must develop in ourselves and our children an appreciation of the natural world that leads us to an environmental ethic. It is only through love of God's creation that our commitment to earth-keeping can take root. Our theology based in scripture, demands this.

An appreciation of nature begins at the individual level. Simply planting a seed, nurturing it and observing how it develops and makes new seeds is a way of beginning. The backyard and schoolyard, though often surrounded by the "un-natural," can abound with living things. If you get down on your hands and knees you can see insects and plants in a new way; you can also feel the earth and get a sense of the cool dampness of dirt which provides nourishment to all of life.

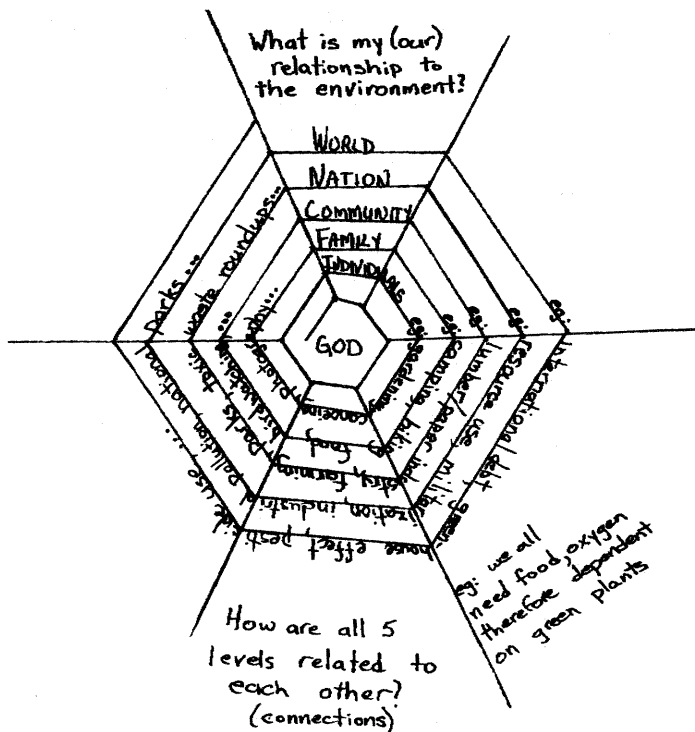
Once our curiosity about nature is piqued, we can broaden our knowledge through books, videotapes, television documentaries, nature organizations and so forth. We can not only gain a deeper understanding of nature, but we can begin to desire to experience nature. We may seek out a park, forest or field, sit down and close our eyes. Using all of our senses except sight—listening, smelling, touching and even tasting—we can experience our world in a whole new way. Even in areas where it is easy to say "there's nothing here," if we take time and use all of our senses it is rare that the initial impression is true. We have to be willing to get out and look for signs of life.

A pattern from nature itself, the web, can be used to represent our connectedness to creation. We place God at the center then ask ourselves how do I, my family, my community, my country and my world relate to the environment? The diagram presented below illustrates how we all affect and are affected by the environment of the earth. The diagram can be used as part of a process, either individually or in groups, to further the discussion of responsible earth stewardship. The examples are provided only to illustrate how the web can be used; obviously each person or group is going to have different examples of their connections.

Change begins at home with individuals, but to stop at that level is to plant the seeds but to forget to water them. We must also work within the business and political world if improvements are to have a lasting effect. We must put pressure on the business community through our purchasing power to put the environment, rather than profit, at the top of their list of priorities. Further, we must apply the same pressure to the political arena so political decisions are made in the best interests of the environment. Unless all sectors of society are prepared to work on the crisis together, we stand very little chance of coming through it without extreme consequences.

A walk in the woods, laying out in a field watching the clouds go by, listening to nature's music, gardening, studying a pond or lake, bird watching, star-gazing, nature photography, taking an ant's-eye view of the world—all these enrich our lives. Further, they allow us to commit ourselves to working hard to ensure the continuation of life on this planet and instill respect and concern for this earth in our children.

Gloria Musson and Heather Marshall own and operate Earthcare Peace Study Center, a center for environmental and peace education in Edson, Alberta. Corinne Marshall is a retired high school science teacher and involved with MCC Alberta Peace and Social Concerns.



"The earth is the Lord's and
the fullness thereof, the
world and all who dwell
therein." Psalm 24:1



Merely a Strand in the Web of Life

The article below is excerpted from a speech given by Chief Seattle in 1854 at an assembly of tribes preparing to sign treaties with whites who had overrun their lands. While fearing the intentions of white men, Chief Seattle had welcomed them nonetheless and even accepted their God, becoming a Christian.

Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of the red man.

The perfumed flowers are our sisters; the deer, the horse, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the juices of the meadows, the body heat of the pony, and man—all belong to the same family.

The red man has always retreated before the advancing white man, as the mist of the mountains runs before the morning sun. But the ashes of our fathers are sacred. Their graves are holy ground, and so these hills, these trees, this portion of the earth is consecrated to us. We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs. The earth is not his brother, but his enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves on. He leaves his fathers' graves behind, and he does not care. He kidnaps the earth from his children. He does not care. His fathers' graves and his children's birthright are forgotten. He treats his mother, the earth, and his brother, the sky, as things to be bought,

plundered, sold like sheep or bright beads. His appetite will devour the earth and leave behind only a desert.

You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our grandfathers. So that they will respect the land, tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. Teach your children what we have taught our children, that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves.

This we know. The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected.

Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

One thing we know, which the white man may one day discover—our God is the same God. You may think now that you own Him as you wish to own our land, but you cannot. He is the God of man and His compassion is equal for the red man and the white. This earth is precious to Him and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its Creator. The whites too shall pass; perhaps sooner than all other tribes. Continue to contaminate your bed, and you will one night suffocate in your own waste.

Where is the thicket? Gone. Where is the eagle? Gone. And what is it to say goodbye to the swift pony and the hunt? The end of living and the beginning of survival.

When the last red man has vanished from this earth, and his memory is only the shadow of a cloud moving across the prairie, these shores and forests will still hold the spirits of my people. For they love this earth as the newborn loves its mother's heartbeat. So if we sell you our land, love it as we've loved it. Care for it as we've cared for it. Hold in your mind the memory of the land as it is when you take it. And with all your strength, with all your mind, with all your heart, preserve it for your children and love it...as God loves us all.



- The following facts are excerpted from the book **50 Simple Things You Can Do To Save The Earth**. To order a copy write to NRDC, 50 Simple Things, 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011.
- Americans receive almost two million tons of junk mail every year. About 44 percent of the junk mail is never even opened or read. Nonetheless, the average American still spends eight full months of his or her life just opening junk mail. To stop your name from being sold to most large mailing list companies write to: Mail Preference Service, Direct Marketing Association, 6 East 43rd St., New York NY 10017.
- Coffee filters, paper towels, etc. are white because they're bleached. The process of bleaching paper is responsible for creating dioxin, a deadly toxic which has been dumped into American waterways. To buy unbleached coffee filters contact Rockline, Inc., P.O. Box 1007, Sheboygan, WI 53082. Or try reusable cotton coffee filters.
- Some 240-260 million tires are discarded annually in the U.S. It takes half a barrel of crude oil to produce the rubber in one truck tire. Right now there are more than half a billion tires being used in the U.S. It is estimated that 50 to 80 percent of them are underinflated. Since underinflation can waste up to 5 percent of a car's fuel this means that more than 65 million car owners could substantially boost their cars' fuel efficiency by simply putting more air in their tires. Two billion gallons of gas could be saved by doing this!

by Jean Hilborn

The Environment: A Women's Issue

Where do I begin to tell the story of how I came to call myself an environmentalist? A journey that, sadly, includes being part of the problem—a polluter. With goods produced in one country sold in another halfway around the world, I have learned that my habits affect the environment in not only my neighborhood, but in communities around the world. My story is also that of other women.

I grew up on a dairy farm in Waterloo County. When I was young, I remember my father attending soil conservation meetings. We threw the kitchen scraps to the pigs or onto the garden. We canned and preserved our fruits and vegetables, storing them in the cellar. Our milk came from the barn in tin pails in which we had bought corn syrup and our friends in town got their milk in reused glass bottles. We wrapped our sandwiches to take to school in the wax paper from the bread wrappers or the cereal boxes—we even brought the wax paper home to reuse it. We saved our worn out clothes for the "rag man." We didn't rake the cut grass off the lawn each time we mowed the yard, and we saved the leaves to put on the flower beds and the garden over the winter. At Fraser Lake Camp, where I worked for several summers, we did not use soap or shampoos in the lake because of the pollution it would cause, and I learned to feel even closer to God's creation and to treasure it.



When I began working away from home, I moved into town and lived in small apartments with no place to throw kitchen scraps. Living alone, it was easier to fix meals from individually packaged foods and to just throw away wax paper. Many products such as bleaches and dish detergents came in new plastic bottles which did not break like glass bottles could and new cleaning products made housework easier. At that time, I did not think about the pollutants created in their manufacture and disposal. To dispose of my garbage, I simply set it on the curb each week and it disappeared. It went to a dump somewhere, but it wasn't in my backyard so it did not concern me. I thought I was doing my share because I did recycle my tin, aluminum, glass and newspapers and I sent my clothing to the local MCC thrift store.

Things changed when I became involved in the fight to "Stop the Dump." A private company is attempting to turn the Acton limestone quarry, located just two miles from my house, into a garbage dump for "non-hazardous" waste. The 300-acre quarry cuts through the aquifer which supplies water to the surrounding farm lands and neighboring towns. To solve our water shortages, our politicians want to pipe water up from Lake Ontario. No thanks! The water in the Great Lakes is already polluted, we don't want to drink it or dump our sewer systems into it.

If the quarry is turned into a garbage dump, not only would our water supplies become contaminated, but we would also have the burden of more truck traffic and increased safety hazards as the trucks pass our schools and travel along school bus routes. The company proposing this dump is doing it to make a profit. They propose to take garbage from all across southern Ontario—one million tons of garbage a year for the next 20 years.

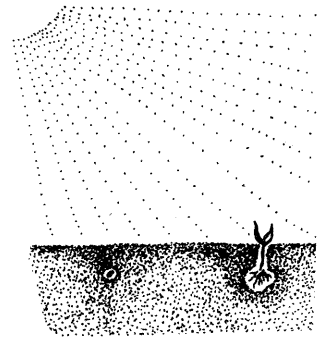
In 1987, in response to this proposed dump, the citizens in the community organized to oppose the plan and formed the group P.O.W.E.R. (Protect Our Water and Environmental Resources). I joined P.O.W.E.R. in 1988 and became a member of the board of directors. Then, six months ago H.E.L.P. (Halton Environmental Land Protection) formed in response to yet another proposal to turn an even larger limestone quarry into a "non-hazardous" garbage dump. I am currently the chairperson for this fledgling new group. Sometimes I feel stressed with all this involvement, but I also feel that if I'm not part of the solution, then I am contributing to the problem.

- According to Diet for a New America, if Americans reduced their meat intake by just 10 percent, the savings in grains and soybeans could adequately feed 60 million people—the number of people who starve to death, worldwide, each year.
- If every commuter car carried just one more passenger, we'd save 600,000 gallons of gasoline

and keep 12 million pounds of "greenhouse gases" out of the atmosphere every day.



- Billions of gallons of water could be saved every year by installing "low-flow" shower heads.
- If every American family planted just one tree, over a billion pounds of "greenhouse gases" would be removed from the atmosphere every year.



Once I became involved, I realized that I had to provide some solid reasons and alternatives when speaking to government agencies, politicians and my fellow commuters and neighbors about the reason for opposing this dump. I began to read and learn about what happens to our garbage after we throw it away. I learned that a lot of our household wastes, including our garbage goes to a landfill. The toxins coming out the bottom of the dump—which result from rain percolating throughout the landfill—are considered hazardous. Both the Canadian and U.S. government environmental agencies acknowledge that all dumps leak. It is only a matter of time until the pollutants get into our underground water supplies or into our rivers and lakes. If household garbage is burned, it puts out harmful pollutants both through the smoke stacks and in the resulting ash, which is considered hazardous.

The area of Kitchener which was used as a garbage dump 20 years ago is now filled in and people have built houses on it. However, families can no longer live in some of those houses because of the methane gas coming out of the ground from the festering garbage below. I wonder how long it will be before we find that some of the water supply has become contaminated from the toxic brew percolating out the bottom of this closed dump. This same story is occurring in many communities across North America.

As a result of all I have learned, I am changing my lifestyle. I am saying no to overpackaged merchandise and to toxic cleaning products. I use cleaning products which are not made from environmentally harmful chemicals—even if they require more "elbow grease." Some of the products are not as convenient and household chores can take more time, but time is not always the most important factor. We must change our habits and begin to teach our children environmentally friendly lifestyles.

One of the ways we learn about the effects of toxins in our environment is when it affects our health. And, the health of women is affected. In areas with a lot of environmental contamination, we see increased rates of miscarriages and birth defects, not to mention respiratory sicknesses and allergic reactions. There is also an increase in infertility in men. We are quick to call it against God's will when a doctor performs an abortion with the consent of the woman, but we sit back and say nothing when companies continue to spew out contaminants that cause abortions—we call them

miscarriages to make it sound natural. Are we not also responsible for these environmental abortions by continuing to sit back and do nothing about the products we use that are part of the pollution problem?

The more I learn, the more I realize that we need to act now to protect the water and air world-wide. We in North America have to learn to live a lifestyle that is not dependent on so many synthetic chemicals. It's back to cotton, linen, silk, or other natural materials to replace the polyesters and other synthetic fabrics which are so convenient. It is also back to glass, metal and ceramic containers which can be reused and recycled. How do we reach our sisters around the world and try to help them understand that the many comforts in our lifestyle are also hurting them? If they choose our conveniences in the name of economic growth, they will also suffer the consequences with which we are now struggling. I am learning that I have to develop a simpler lifestyle that is less dependent on products and convenience which damage our environment. It is not easy.

I have much to learn. It is hard some days for me to admit to God, the Creator of this beautiful earth, that I have not done a very good job of protecting her gift to us, or that I am leaving it in poor condition for our children and grandchildren. I must speak out when corporations hurt us and when our governments do not enforce the laws already in place or are slow to enact new and stricter laws. We can make a difference with positive protest and because we love and care for our brothers and sisters in the next house, the next town and halfway around the world.

Jean Hilborn lives in Acton, Ontario. She works as administrative assistant for an organization that operates group homes for children with severe mental and physical disabilities. Jean is currently on the board of directors and chairperson of H.E.L.P. and a board member for P.O.W.E.R.

Resources

- **Caretakers: Earth Stewardship for Children.** MCC children's learning and giving project. Available free from MCC.
- **Fragile—Handle With Care, An Earthkeeper's Handbook.** Produced by MCC Ontario Agricultural Concerns Committee, 1989. Available free from MCC Ontario, 50 Kent Ave., Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1.

- **Home Personal Action Guide.** Project for the United Nations Environment Programme. Available from Friends of the United Nations, Ocean Ave., Suite 91, Santa Monica, CA 90401. Cost is \$1.50 for single copies, \$1 for larger quantities.



- **Seven Reasons to Stop Using Styrofoam.** Brochure by MCC U.S. Global Education office. Available free from MCC.
- **Add Justice to Your Shopping List.** Book by Marilyn Helmuth Voran, Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pa., 1986.
- **State of the World 1990,** Lester Brown et al., W.W. Norton Co., New York, 1989.

- **Earth Stewardship Packet.** Resource prepared by the MCC U.S. Global Education office that describes environmental problems from Christian perspective. Includes worship aids. Available free from MCC.
- **Is Cleaning Your House Polluting the Earth?** Brochure by MCC U.S. Global Education office on alternative household cleansers. Available free from MCC.

by Sheri Hostetler

Dancing to the Same Tune

It wasn't until I moved to Arizona at the age of 24 that I started noticing the natural world around me. Sure, I used to like going for walks in the woods surrounding my house in Ohio. But nature was only a backdrop to the real action—my thoughts, my feelings, my conversations. Or nature was something to be used purely for recreational purposes, like water-skiing. In Arizona I noticed the land itself. Perhaps this was because the shape and color of the desert earth seemed so strange to an eye accustomed to softly rolling hills and green grassy plains. I became more and more awed by the beauty constantly happening around me. Before long I could not drive outside Phoenix, where I lived, without pulling the car to the side of the road to gaze at some new spectacle. One December evening, a friend and I waited out a magnificent half-hour sunset, watching as a hazy blue sky was consumed one molecule at a time by a marauding band of golden yellows, rosy pinks, and finally, increasingly aggressive shades of purple.

On my various camping trips throughout Arizona I began to not only appreciate nature's beauty but see nature itself as a vital, alive—almost personal—force. My most striking experience of this happened one night when I was camping on a mountaintop in northern Arizona, 9100 feet in the air and miles from another human. For some reason, I couldn't sleep. Perhaps there was too much silence for ears dulled by the continuous hum of city life, of tires skidding on pavement, refrigerators running, doors slamming and low murmuring from the apartment next door. I decided to go for a walk. Unzipping the tent door, I stumbled into a land I had never seen before. My fire circle, the log I sat on to eat, even my car were indistinguishable in the darkness that blended everything into the same shade of blue. Tall, darkened forms—were they trees?—surrounded me. I felt I was in an arena. I was sure I was being watched. By whom? Or what? Then I looked up and saw a sky overtaken by stars. "I see you," the sky and trees seemed to say to me.

When I got home, I read from the book of Psalms and saw my own experience of nature as alive and vital reflected in its pages. My favorite verse was Psalm 96:11, which speaks very personally of nature:

"Let the heavens rejoice and earth be glad!
Let the sea thunder, and all it holds!
Let the countryside exult, and all that is in it,
and all the trees of the forest cry out for joy.



Now, as I study theology and ethics, I strive to find a way to incorporate my deep experience of the "aliveness" of nature with an appropriate environmental ethic. According to the traditional Christian (and Mennonite) ethic of stewardship, humans have been given the responsibility to take care of the earth and use it for our own development, much as a gardener tends her plot so that it brings forth food to eat. This model is better than simply viewing the earth as something to be subdued and conquered, mercilessly exploited for the sake of human "progress." And, in an age when humans have the capacity to destroy the world through nuclear annihilation or environmental degradation, the stewardship emphasis on human responsibility for taking care of the earth is extremely important.

I have concluded that the traditional Christian ethic of stewardship is not complete. It only expresses a partial truth. My experience has taught me that we are taken care of by the earth as much as we take care of it. The soil and sun give us food; the air gives us breath; we are completely sustained and nurtured by the physical elements around us. Indeed, we are made from this earth, and to the earth we eventually return. In other words, we are not in a one-way, paternalistic relationship with creation, but in a mutual relationship. If we have ears to hear, the birds, trees, rocks, and sea have much to teach us.

**"The heavens declare the
glory of God..." Psalm 19:1**

In this technological world of unbridled progress and irresponsible growth, we can learn from nature something about balanced relationships, a slower rhythm and acceptance of limitations. In addition, we need to see nature as good in and of itself, apart from humans. For me the stewardship model tends to be too utilitarian; that is, it sees nature as being good only insofar as it is useful to us. But God declared all creation good—bats, water lilies, yellow-bellied sapsuckers, snowflakes, and ring-tailed monkeys. These things have intrinsic worth, like humans, simply because God made them. The sparrow singing in the tree outside my window has no discernible human use. It just is, and that is good.

For these reasons, I believe we need to take the ethic of stewardship a step further. We need to cultivate an ethic of interdependence. In this model, humans acknowledge that we have a responsibility to take care of (i.e., not destroy) the earth and that the earth also takes care of us. We realize, in other words, our total interdependence. We feel in our bones that we are a part of nature, that the created order supports and nurtures us. We recognize the creative energy of God flowing through all creation, connecting us together in a durable, flexible—but fragile—web of life. It is because of this deep connection to creation, this sense of mutuality, respect and love, that we are empowered to truly care for the earth. Thus, we must become the earth's advocates against governments and corporations that take no heed of her waters, her air, or the birds and beasts. In our own lives we must tread lightly on the earth, recycling, picking up, conserving and tending as we go.

For me, taking care of the earth is not a duty or act of obedience but a great joy. I am continuously discovering that I and the earth are inextricably bound in ways I had not imagined, that we are dancing together to the same tune. In Arizona, I heard that song for the first time. It is still ringing in my ears.

Sheri Hostetler recently completed her master's degree in feminist liberation theology at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass. She is currently working as a part-time secretary and part-time writer while trying to decide what one does with a master's degree in theology. Reared in a Mennonite Conference church in Ohio, she now attends a Society of Friends church in Boston.

by Cynthia Nolt

Subsidence

I left Kentucky feeling both excited and depressed. Looking back on my four days in the Appalachian region of Kentucky, the most striking memory I have is of climbing up a mountain on a cold, wet day with Hazel, a woman in her 70's, to see for ourselves what "subsidence" means with respect to coal mining. Hazel is retired from the army and has a good pension so she is one person the coal companies cannot buy or blackmail, and that gives her power many don't have in this area of Appalachia. I don't even know the name of the mountain we climbed, but, then again, I'm not sure that is important to the story which began to take shape before our eyes.

A large amount of mining goes on in the area of Kentucky where we were and much of it is coal mining. First impressions could lead one to believe the people who held the deed to the mountain we climbed were lucky because the mountain was deep-mined rather than strip-mined. But, because they "robbed the pillars" before they closed the mine, such impressions could prove to be too hasty. "Robbing the pillars" is a mining term I had not heard before, but now I know all too well what it means. The coal in the mountains of eastern Kentucky occurs in alternating layers. When veins of coal are mined out of a mountain, blocks of it are left in place to provide support for the mountain. "Robbing the pillars" is when additional coal is obtained from the mine by removing these supports, and for a few more dollars the substructure within the mountain is permanently destroyed. That is what had happened to the mountain which we climbed that cold, wet day in November.

Now, as a mountain "subsides," cracks in the soil of the mountain appear which can run horizontally along the mountain for many yards. In some cases, if you did not

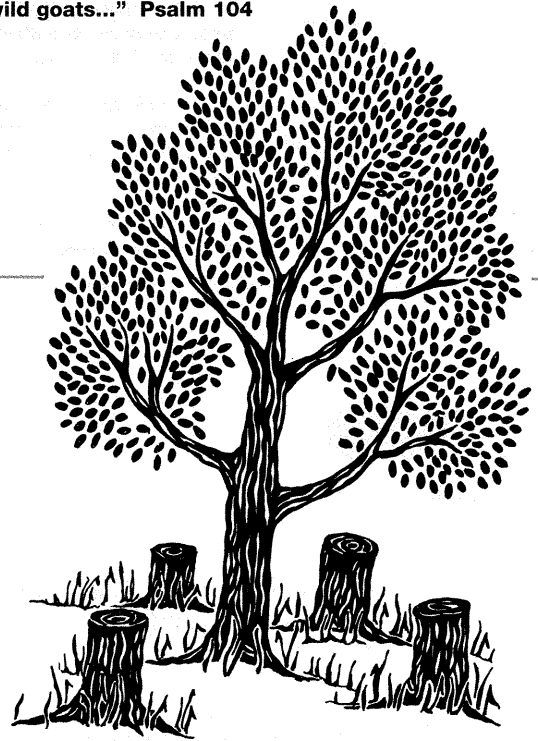
**"The trees of the Lord are
watered abundantly...In them
the birds build their nests...
the high mountains are for
the wild goats..." Psalm 104**

know what they were, you might not even give such cracks a second thought. Indeed, as I stood back contemplating the cracks nearer the base of the mountain, I confess my first thought was "that's all?" I had expected something more obvious, something much larger, but as I continued to contemplate these "small" cracks I began to feel there was definitely something unnatural about cracks in the soil that ran for many yards, through underbrush and beside trees, especially during such a wet time of the year. As it turned out, those cracks "were not all." There were larger ones on up the mountain and I later learned a crucial fact about the area where I was now looking at the "small" cracks.

The mountain used to belong to Hazel's grandfather, and although it is no longer in her family, she took an interest in it. When the first signs of subsidence began to show, she called the coal company responsible as well as the state or federal officials in order to get them to reclaim the area, as is required by law. Their first attempt at reclamation consisted of stringing barbed wire at various places on the mountain, with DANGER signs interspersed at sporadic intervals. Hazel continued herefforts to ensure some more responsible reclamation was carried out, and I guess you would have to say she was successful because more was done. But I also began to realize what she already knew: once the supports are gone, there is no way to prevent continued subsidence and no way to know when, where, or how often cracks and crevices will appear on the mountain.

The success Hazel got was that the coal companies brought in large "earth-movers" and filled in the larger cracks and crevices with soil from the mountain. (I learned the spot where those first cracks I saw were newly reclaimed.) Only a few weeks earlier the coal company had come in and "reclaimed" that area, filling (or attempting to cover) the crevices, spreading soil around, throwing grass seed on the land and covering it with a sparse layer of straw. Already the cracks were returning.

As we continued up the mountain, we saw other "reclaimed" areas. But here the mountain was steeper, and in order to fill the larger crevices that had formed they had to make big gouges in the mountain. What was once a steep but fairly constant slope on the side of the mountain was replaced by a large "step" towering beside an area of loose red earth, sparsely covered with straw and already beginning to crack again. In fact, it was at one of these "reclaimed" areas that we saw the largest crevice. We did not get very close to the edge, for safety's



sake, but as we neared the edge, we could smell stale, dank air. Air like one would expect to smell inside a mountain. And as Hazel rolled a large boulder laying beside the hole into it, we could not see where it landed.

In spite of the weather, that trip up the mountain was enjoyable and educational. There is so much left unsaid, so many more things to reflect on about what is done and left undone in the Appalachian region of Kentucky. One could read reports and dismiss it as something that does not occur anymore, or say "subsidence" is a small price to pay for coal which our country needs to meet its energy needs. But after seeing how things are done, how decisions are made and who benefits from them, I cannot dismiss the observations so easily. Hazel told us how she used to hunt and fish in the mountains where she grew up, but very little of that can be done anymore. Hazel described the effects of mining like this: "Mining causes subsidence, increased erosion and runoff. Then they call the flooding that results 'an act of God.' If you ask me, the devil's in there somewhere." If only we would all reflect on the action of ourselves and others as honestly as Hazel does.

Cynthia Nolt wrote this article after spending four days in December of 1987 touring MCC's programs in the Appalachian region of Kentucky soon after beginning her assignment with the Washington Office of MCC.

- **Women in Leadership**
- **Ann Weber Becker** was ordained as a pastoral team member at First Mennonite Church of Kitchener, Ont. in June. She has served there since 1987.
- **Pam Dintaman** was licensed as a pastoral team member at Southside Fellowship, Elkhart, Ind. in April.
- **Gerald and Sara Wenger Shenk** became pastors of Broad Street Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., in July. They served previously in church-related work in Yugoslavia.
- **John and Barbara Moyer Lehman** were ordained as pastors of Orrville (Ohio) Mennonite Church in May.
- **Diane M. Crutcher** of Normal, Ill. has been named the manager of human resource development for BroMenn Healthcare in Bloomington, Ill.
- **Joyce Stradinger Gerhart**, Hereford Mennonite Church, Bally, Pa., will become the new president of Eastern District Conference Women in Mission in 1991.
- **Beth Hege** has been appointed news service editor for the General Conference.
- **Mary Schertz**, assistant professor of New Testament at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, was one of 10 international theologians invited to an historic meeting in March with Palestinian Christians at the Ecumenical Institute for Theological Research at Tantur, near Bethlehem.

Letters

- Thank you for sending copies of *Report*. I have gone through almost all the copies you sent and am looking forward to the next issues.

Women's development cannot be complete without spiritual development and I have passed on copies I have read to friends. The issue on wife abuse (No. 74) was very interesting. The author's explanation of certain issues using Ephesians 5 gave me a new insight into those familiar verses.

The issue of abuse in our society is of a different nature where polygamy is accepted and women go through untold hardship to save marriages that are dead. Once again thank you.

—Joyce Mangwat, Jos, Nigeria

- Something *is* skewed with what you describe happening in the *Report* issue on Women: Bearing the Cross of Discipleship (No. 89). A theology which leads to "the death of confidence, the death of ourselves, the death of hope" cannot be one which comes from God. We are ignoring the "danger signals" which say we are on the wrong path in life. A theology of service and submission which leads us towards dying instead of living is warped.

This theology has become an excuse for why some of us allow ourselves to wither away as people. True, Jesus' life led deliberately through service and submission to death on the cross and, later, the resurrection. But Jesus was wholly present in the process. Surely he would not advocate that service and submission lead to the elimination of our very selves?

I am not saying that we should stop being servants. No. I believe that more of us need to take the role of servanthood more seriously in our lives. But this is the very problem. Submission only works if everyone concerned lives in the same spirit of giving to each other.

Thank you for tackling these kinds of issues in *Report*. I enjoy reading each one of them.

—Joyce Maxwell, Morgantown, W.V.

- Sexual assault and domestic violence are peace issues. I believe that as Anabaptists who see peacemaking as central to our understanding of faith, we have a theological contribution to make to the discussion of these issues. One of the ways our peace witness will be most relevant in our society is to apply it to these social problems so prevalent in North American culture. The place which is to be the "safe haven" from the "cruel" world is for many women and children just the opposite. The street is safer than the home.

We as a church need to acknowledge that the problem exists in large proportions and that we are not immune to it. We need to inform ourselves with correct information and dispel myths.

All the best as you continue your work. Thanks for doing a great job on *Report*. It is an excellent magazine.

—Christine Kampen, Saskatoon, Sask.

- I have read several issues of *Report* when they were available in the Fresno Pacific College Library. I have been deeply touched by what I read—especially the issue on Women: Bearing the Cross of Discipleship (No. 89). Thank you and keep up the wonderful work that is being done.
- I am writing to inform you of my change of residence. I also want to express how much I enjoy this publication. It is especially refreshing to read about both domestic and foreign women's concerns.

I am a Mennonite graduate student studying child care, family, and public policy issues. I am interested in issues pertaining to Christian women's perspectives on working mothers and how the church has responded to these changing family roles.

—Rhonda Zebr, Charlottesville, Va.

• **Jan Steckley** has begun as associate pastor at Breslau(Ont.) Mennonite Church.

• **Vicki Dyck**, of Rosthern, Sask., has resigned from her teaching position at Rosthern Junior College to do free-lance art and theater projects, workshops and public speaking.

• **Erica Janzen** of Winnipeg, Man. will be an associate

professor of nursing at Bethel College, N. Newton, Kan.

• **Heidi Regier Kreider** of New Haven, Conn., was the summer intern pastor at Faith Church, Minneapolis and the St. Paul (Minn.) Fellowship. She is a student at Yale Divinity School.

• **Edith Painter**, a Bluffton (Ohio) College professor of

psychology, won an award from the Sears Roebuck Foundation for teaching excellence and campus leadership.

News and Verbs

• Mennonite Health Services awarded seven *scholarships for studies in a mental health field* during the 1990-91 school year as part of its Elmer Ediger Memorial Scholarship program. Among the recipients are Janet Friesen of Phoenix, Ariz.; Donna Pyle Minter of Providence, R.I.; Janet Panning of Lansdale, Pa.; and Marian Wiens of Waterloo, Ont.

• The National Council of Churches' Justice for Women Working Group announces the publication of its latest resource, *Sisters in the Streets: Planning for Ministry with Women Who Are Prostitutes*. It is a "how-to" manual for groups who would like to start a Christian ministry with people involved in prostitution. Single copies are available free of charge from the NCC Justice for Women Working Group, 475 Riverside Drive, Room 572, New York, NY 10115.

• Over 200 women and men gathered to participate in the working group *Herstories at Mennonite World Conference* in Winnipeg in July. Four women, from Latino, Aboriginal, Indian and African origins, told their stories and then opened the floor for questions and discussion. The murder of female children, wife abuse, unmarried adult women treated as minors and the use of rape as a method of intimidation and control were only a few of the sufferings shared.

Despite the hopelessness and pain of their stories, the women were also able to tell stories of hope and joy, of situations where women are gaining respect and the rights of opportunity they deserve. There were stories of women taking leadership and making an impact. Many questions were left unanswered, many problems left unsolved, but women's stories of joy and pain, hope and despair, success and failure were told, and herstory was heard.

• In Belfast, Ireland, the first two female priests were ordained in the (Anglican) Church of Ireland. Three other women are expected to be priested by the end of the year, and two more next year. Other areas with

Give Women's Concerns Report this Christmas

Topics in 1991 will include: mental illness, materialism, drugs, cross-cultural adjustments

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female Anglican priests include the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Brazil, Cuba, Hong Kong, Kenya, and Uganda.

- The MCC Committee on Women's Concerns is looking for replacements for two members whose terms are expiring. Brenda Glanzer, of Hesston, Kan., has served as General Conference representative on the committee since 1988. Jan Lewis of Alexandria, Va., a member since 1987, represented the Brethren in Christ. The three-year positions are open to a General Conference woman and a Brethren in Christ woman from the United States. For more information or to express interest, contact Christine Nofsinger, MCC, PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in *REPORT* do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT edited by Christine Wenger Nofsinger. Layout by Shirley Stauffer Redekop. Correspondence and address changes should be sent to Chris Nofsinger, Editor, MCC, PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.

U.S. residents may send subscriptions to the above address. Canadian residents may send subscriptions to MCC Canada, 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1. A donation of \$10.00 per year per subscription is suggested.

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

- According to Diana Johnston in *In These Times*, *Africa has become a prime dumping target* for U.S. and European waste, a trend exposed in recent years by European environmentalists but not widely publicized in the U.S. The efforts to dump on Africa led to the 1989 Basel Convention which recognized the "right of every country to refuse to accept toxic waste." However, the targeted countries are poor, in debt, and in need of the funds Western countries are willing to pay to dump their waste.
- Irene Diamond, who teaches political science at the University of Oregon, asserts that women "*more often than not are the victims of environmental atrocities.*" She represents an aspect of ecofeminism that emphasizes women's reproductive role as a model for nurturing rather than dominating nature. Such attitudes take concrete form, as in India where women threw themselves around trees to prevent logging.



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